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(Little, 2022a)

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# More COVID medicines for most at-risk New Zealanders



HON ANDREW LITTLE(/MINISTER/HON-ANDREW-LITTLE)

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- First batch of the 60,000 courses of Paxlovid coming this year has arrived and will be used from next week.
- Pharmac secures access to preventative COVID treatment Evusheld.

New Zealand is boosting its comprehensive suite of medicines to treat COVID-19 with the arrival in the country of one medication, Paxlovid, and the securing of access to the country's first pre-exposure prophylactic treatment, Health Minister Andrew Little has announced.

"Two years ago, at the start of the pandemic, we had no vaccines or medicines to specifically treat COVID-19 or prevent it spreading," Andrew Little said.

"Now, we have four vaccines and 95 per cent of eligible people are vaccinated. And we've got four medicines being used in hospitals now to treat people who need it – Baricitinib, Ronapreve, Remdesivir and Tocilizumab.

"From next week we'll be adding Paxlovid to the mix – pills that people with mild cases who are at the highest risk of becoming seriously unwell can take at home.

"The first shipment of Paxlovid has arrived in New Zealand ahead of schedule and will start being offered to those most at risk from next week, protecting people from getting seriously ill and the health system from being overwhelmed.

"Access to Paxlovid will be tight to make sure it gets to the people who need it most. It will be prescribed by doctors, with factors such as age, disability and being immuno-compromised taken into account."

Pharmac, the national medicines-funding agency, has also secured access to another medicine, Molnupiravir, which is awaiting Medsafe approval.

"That's six medicines, and I am very pleased with the news today that Pharmac has secured access to a seventh, AstraZeneca's Evusheld, which can prevent people who can't have vaccines from getting COVID-19," Andrew Little said.

"Evusheld is a pre-exposure prophylactic treatment that can actually stop people developing COVID-19, and, if approved by Medsafe, will be an invaluable tool to protect people who can't have vaccines.

"It means we will have medicines to treat those who need it, from before an infection sets in right through to cases of severe infection. It's a remarkable achievement in two years, and part of our plan to keep New Zealanders safe as we head into winter.

“The emergence of highly effective vaccines and medicines means we can better manage COVID-19 while reopening our borders and easing restrictions. They mean we can shift our focus towards recovery more secure in the knowledge we have a highly vaccinated population and those most at risk of the virus will also have medicines to help protect them.”

Funding for all COVID medicines comes from the Government’s COVID-19 fund.

#### **Editors’ notes:**

#### **How is Evusheld different from a vaccine?**

Vaccination uses a person’s immune system to create antibodies that provide protection against infectious diseases such as COVID-19. Monoclonal antibody treatments such as Evusheld allow antibodies that provide protection against COVID-19 to be given directly to a patient and does not require a patient’s immune system to create these antibodies. This means Evusheld is a particularly useful treatment for people who are immunocompromised and would not be able to generate antibodies in response to vaccination against COVID-19.

Evusheld is not a substitute for vaccination against COVID-19 but it does provide an option for the small group of people who are not able to be vaccinated

More information about New Zealand’s COVID medicines can be found on Pharmac's website. (<https://pharmac.govt.nz/news-and-resources/covid19/treatcovid/>)



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